

tS: tuned by STI

WRX's new top performer by Joe Sage

Facing well-known industrywide global regulatory and powertrain headwinds and uncertainties, Subaru opted not to bring a new WRX STI to market this year. While demand is fine now, its market couldn't be assured for enough years to recoup development costs. (The murky crystal ball may already be shifting—see sidebar.) But fear not—the new WRX tS, tuned by STI but utilizing more of the basis vehicle, is here instead.

Top performance variants of WRX had evolved through the WRX STI era, to the stripped-down WRX TR (tuner ready), which, as its name implied, was aimed at buyers who were likely to start modding their car the day they got it home from the dealer. Now the new WRX tS has basically done the best mods for you, straight from the factory.

The full WRX lineup has the same 271-hp 2.4L turbo boxer, while WRX tS is 6-speed manual-only,

with active torque vectoring. The WRX tS features new STI-tuned suspension with electronically controlled dampers and revised suspension tuning, high-performance Brembo brakes, 19-inch wheels with Bridgestone Potenza S007 tires, hood scoop, brake cooling inlets, a mild spoiler, quad exhaust pipes, a new LCD digital cluster, Recaro seats, and a range of style cues inside and out. Most of the performance details have additionally boosted specs.

All this is priced at \$45,705 in a fairly tightly spaced lineup starting at \$35,750. (Also at \$45,705 is a WRX GT with CVT shift.)

Notable details in the WRX tS's basic specifications are its tight wheelbase to overall length—in fact, the tS, with its different wheels, suspension and brakes—has a turning circle about 9 inches tighter than the others, as well as lighter weight than upper trims, augmented by lightweight com-

ponents and also its power moonroof delete.

Also notable is exceptional front legroom, over 43 inches. This is always welcome for us taller people, but was especially so as we investigated the manual transmission and drive modes.

The tS does not have rev-matching (blip-shifting), to us a good sign—something many incorporate to assist the unfamiliar manual shifter and something we turn off as soon as possible. The transmission is lively—easily taking you through the first three gears in very short order, as you turn from a side street stop onto a busy highway when the light turns green. We played with sport plus mode at first, which did not seem to affect shifts notably, but was a bit too lively in town. (It never stalled, but pedal action could give us a good goose.) But the solution was a familiar one—the enthusiast driver needs to get leg-to-clutch distance just right, and this legroom gives great latitude, leading to shifting perfection. (We ignored modes from that point, which also suits us, best straight out of the box.) The one thing we did still

encounter were surprisingly strict rev limiters, but you soon get clutch action and shift patterns perfected in line with that headroom.

The apparent bonus from this tight shift pattern is that while this powertrain puts out 271 hp versus 310 in the last STI (straight across 12.6 percent less), shift mapping in the tS makes it arguably unlikely that you will regularly miss it.

The ride is very firm and tight. Cruising on our freeways, where any kind of rough surface is rare, this feels just right. On a sweeping flyover ramp, you will feel the seams, but this is just an opportunity to enjoy a great command experience.

Much as when the big wing came off the STI in 2015, this version of the WRX is sure to reach a wider, if less exclusive, enthusiast group than ever. It may not be quite as far along the scale to really extreme, but then again, it's as close to that end of the scale as things get, currently.

Note in the sidebar the potential emergence of a more extreme performance machine coming to light. But one person's waiting game is another's opportunity, and the heroic solution of the WRX tS is right in front of you, right now. The best news is, there are no wrong choices. This is a keeper. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Gunma, Japan
CHASSIS/BODY	.....Subaru Global Platform w full inner frame construction w alum hood & front fenders, ring-shaped reinforcement frame safety structure
ENGINE	.....2.4L 4-cyl boxer high output, twin-scroll turbo & intercooler, DOHC, chain-driven cams, DFI, ETC, dual active valve control (intake/exhaust), alum/alum
HP/TORQUE	.....271 hp / 258 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....10.6:1
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd manual
DRIVETRAIN	.....Contin AWD w viscous-coupling locking center diff (more torque to wheels w best traction)
SUSPENSION	.....4-wheel indep: (tS) STI sport-tuned Electronic Adjustable Ride Control w damper settings shown in drive mode select / display; F: MacPherson-type struts w internal rebound springs; alum lower L-arms w pillow ball mounts & bushings, coils, stblzr bar; (tS) STI-tuned electr adj dampers; R: dbl-wishbone w subframe, pillow ball bushings for lower lateral links, coils, stblzr bar; (tS) STI-tuned electr adj dampers
STEERING	.....quick-ratio dual-pinion elec pwr-asst r&p
BRAKES	.....(tS) Brembo Performance system: F: 13.4 cross-drilled, 6-piston monoblock calipers; R: 12.8 cross-drilled, 2-piston monoblock calipers
WHEELS	.....19x8.5 alum alloy, satin gray
TIRES	.....245/35R19 93Y summer perf
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....183.8 / 105.2 in
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....39.8 / 36.7 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....43.1 / 36.5 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....5.4 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....(tS) 36.06 ft
CARGO CAPACITY	.....12.5 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....3430 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....91 oct rec'd / 16.6 gal
MPG	.....tba
BASE PRICE	.....\$45,705
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1170
TOTAL	.....\$46,875

2025 SUBARU WRX LINEUP

	.....6MT	.....*SPT
WRX Premium	.....\$35,750	.....\$37,100
WRX Limited	.....40,130	.....41,680
WRX tS	.....▼ 45,705--
WRX GT	.....--	.....45,705

*Subaru Performance Transmission is a Lineartronic CVT with 8-spd manual shift modes

NEXT? TOKYO S210 PROTOTYPE



Still watching the horizon for any clues to a possible future WRX STI? Well, tune in to this: Subaru and its motorsport subsidiary STI unveiled a Japanese market S210 prototype at Tokyo Auto Salon 2025 in January.

The S210 prototype is race-bred, incorporating technology and knowledge from the Nurburgring 24-Hour Race. Customized models with various STI performance parts were also displayed, giving more than a subtle hint as to a future consumer build.

The engine, based on the WRX S4's FA24, has a newly developed air cleaner, intake and pre-turbo ducts, and a low back pressure muffler with a new large diameter tail pipe with a cannonball-shaped chamber, all introduced to dramatically reduce intake and exhaust resistance. A specially tuned ECU has a maximum output development target of 300 hp, with notably linear torque in acceleration. As presented, it would be the first S-series vehicle with the Subaru Performance Transmission (as on the WRX tS). Engineers promise to tune shift characteristics to match engine output, to date boasting a high degree of controllability.

Suspension has specially tuned electronic control dampers, coil springs and newly developed rear stabilizer bushes. Riding atop STI Flexible Performance Wheels with specific shapes front and rear, the prototype has Michelin 255/35R19 high-grip tires.

Brakes include Brembo 6-pot front calipers, special brake pads, and front and rear drilled rotors, with tuned electric boosters.

Aerodynamic features include newly developed STI Sport Side Garnish and STI Dry Carbon Rear Spoiler to regulate air flow and achieve high handling performance.

The interior concentrates on black tones, with red details, so the driver can concentrate on situational awareness and driving. New Recaro 8-way power seats have carbon backrests for high grip and comfort.

Stay tuned for further information. ■

